

## Dialogue

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*Outcomes of State Territoriality and Mining Development  
for the Kanak in New Caledonia*

MAIJA LASSILA

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# *Outcomes of State Territoriality and Mining Development for the Kanak in New Caledonia*

*Maija Lassila*

New Caledonia, a department of France located in the South Pacific, is one of the world's key areas in terms of nickel and cobalt resources. Connected to both the territory's colonialist past and the contemporary resource nationalism of its indigenous Melanesian Kanak population, nickel mining is the country's principal industry, and the territory is estimated to hold one of the world's largest reserves of the metal (USGS 2014). Meanwhile, in the political sphere, a referendum on the territory's independence must be held by 2018, representing the culmination of a long process of decolonization, and pressure on both sides is high. My aim in the discussion presented here is to explore the conjuncture of these two elements: to examine and challenge the idea of "development" that is tied to large-scale capitalist mining projects in New Caledonia, taking into account its settler history, its incarnation as a modern neoliberal and territorial state, Kanak sovereignty claims, and Kanak expectations for the future. Involvement with the mining industry has been a way for Kanak to strive for recognition and sovereignty in relation to the Western world; consequently, a central question also to be examined is the degree to which the industry actually enables these goals for the colonized population and the kinds of futures they materialize. It should be noted that this essay is intended as a critical "thought-piece," offering a frame for further investigation rather than a definitive analysis of either mining or independence struggles in the country.

The principal focus of discussion lies on two different examples of nickel production in New Caledonia: the Koniambo nickel refinery project in the largely Kanak North Province, and Goro in the more European South Province. Koniambo was originally established in response to Kanak

nationalist calls for independent economic development in the north and is expected to reach its full capacity by 2016, becoming one of the world's leading nickel producers. On the other hand, since its inception, the Goro nickel project—largely owned by Brazil's Vale New Caledonia (henceforth VNC)—has been seen as a risky project by a broadening base of southern communities operating under a Kanak-led umbrella organization, the Comité Consultatif Coutumier Environnemental (CCCE).

While both the Koniambo and Vale mining projects are embedded in the state's territorializing projects, they appear to incorporate different aspirations and imaginaries for Kanak sovereignty and identity: the Koniambo refinery supports those of an independent future for Kanak and recognition of their economic power and sovereignty in relation to France and the outside world, while the Goro project continues to strengthen French control. The pact of corporate social responsibility for development that has been signed with representatives of local communities (discussed below) merely directs attention away from the socially and economically unequal position of Kanak in New Caledonia, particularly in the south, in relation to the white settler population. On the other hand, both projects equally represent the ambivalent nature of global capitalism, as neither acknowledges the fragility of developmental expectations that are tied to large-scale resource extraction. Ultimately, the aspirations for territory, freedom, and identity recognition of peoples who live in subordinating systems of state power and global economic hierarchies are of little interest to companies engaged in resource extraction, even if outwardly ameliorated by expectations such as those attached to Koniambo or to VNC's "development pact."

As noted by James Ferguson (1994, 256), a discourse of independence that is synonymous with freedom and empowerment may actually work as what he has termed an "anti-politics machine" to localize and depoliticize understandings of the roots of global inequality and poverty. Politically marginalized people in territories that are rich in natural resources, locked into a global capitalist system based on economic hierarchy and exploitation, face considerable barriers to empowerment, independence notwithstanding. Ferguson has further argued that there is, moreover, no such thing as a truly sovereign, independent national economy but, rather, an order of nations that regularly leaves exploited regions to manage their problems alone (2006). Finally, linking development and a nation's independence expectations to large mining projects may allow poverty and inequality to linger on even after independence has been achieved. In New

Caledonia, both the Koniambo and Vale projects work like anti-politics machines: the singular focus on mining in the local discourses of future development and sovereignty directs attention away from the long-term questions of building the nation and developing a viable economy and a just society after colonialism. On the other hand, Koniambo might also prove a truly emancipating project providing room and hope for alternative futures. It is too early to say.

Data for this essay were drawn from in-depth interviews I conducted in New Caledonia in November and December 2014 and from select secondary literature. My main informants were Kanak people working as part of VNC's pact in the South Province and representatives of the southern communities; environmental organizations; the Department of Industry, Mines, and Energy (DIMENC); and the Bureau of Rural Development and Land Ownership (ADRAF). Visits were also made to the town of Koné in North Province where the Koniambo factory is situated.

#### IMAGINING A NATION IN A TERRITORIAL STATE

France colonized New Caledonia in 1853, and the country now has approximately 260,000 inhabitants (ISEE 2014). According to the latest estimations of ethnic origin, about 40 percent belong to the country's indigenous Melanesian Kanak population, 30 percent to the European settler population, and the rest are of Polynesian and Southeast Asian descent (ISEE 2009). Following Benedict Anderson (1991), the nation can be conceptualized as an imagined political community, one visualized as horizontal and communal by those who may never meet each other but are still willing to die for the idea. Further to this, Robert Foster, in his work on Melanesia and Papua New Guinea (2002), has noted how nation making and a nation's "materialization" may take place at the most mundane levels of everyday social life, in conjunction with new media technologies and consumer goods and therefore with the collusion of global capitalism. In the course of this, however, the nation—the politically and globally dominant form of community—translates the claims of subaltern identities into the hegemonic language, simultaneously limiting any possibilities for alternative perspectives (Foster 2002). Thus, articulating and imagining a Kanak identity has been an important element in the slow, postcolonial, state-making process of New Caledonia, although the imaginarity of a Kanak nation has, in recent years, mostly been enabled by its conjuncture with the mining industry.

The term “Kanak” as a designation was born in the anticolonialist protests of the 1970s and was clearly articulated and defined by, for example, the Kanak leader of the independence movement, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (Fisher 2014; Chappell 2013). As Tanya Murray Li argued (2000), notions such as “indigenous” are positionings that emerge from history and from patterns of engagement and struggle rather than being natural or simply invented identifications. Thus references such as “the Kanak” and also the idea of a unitary Kanak state with a solid national framework and a common interest override the diversity of chiefdoms, clans, territories, and languages that make up the actual reality (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998). Thus the indigeneity of the Kanak resonates with the formulations of Alex Golub in his 2014 examination of relations between an abstract aggregate of indigenous PNG people and a local mining corporation. Golub referred to both as “leviathans,” an Old Testament term selected in recognition of the power and agency that local aggregates aspire to and of the antiquity of the kind of entity that the people and the mine he studies hope to become: “social persons, social totalities, macro actors, mass collectivities, and so forth” (2014, 4). In Golub’s terminology, therefore, the notion of the leviathan is a totalizing concept, which he also described as a “remarkable semiotic accomplishment” (2014, 7), for collective entities that on closer examination may be seen as less coherent than they appear and rather composed of multiple actors with diverse interests. Indeed, in a scenario that resonates with VNC’s endorsement of the sustainable development pact, Golub specifically noted the phenomenon whereby a corporation, which clearly lacks hands, may “sign” an agreement (2014, 28).

The violent civil war between the anticolonialist Kanak and French loyalists in the 1980s in New Caledonia made possible the idea of a political referendum, and an image of an independent nation for the Kanak, in a series of agreements. The Matignon-Oudinot Accords of 1988, followed by the Nouméa Accord in 1998, introduced the process of negotiated decolonization to the region (Le Meur and others 2013), and the latter agreement also guaranteed that a referendum would be held between 2014 and 2018. But imagining a nation and establishing a break with the colonialist past require internal and external recognition. As Danielyn Rutherford has argued (2008), while nationalism is performative, a nation comes into existence only when its members can imagine themselves being recognizable to others and when it receives recognition from an extranational point of view. As has already been suggested, the mining industry, by virtue of its revenue generation and global connections, has

been an important factor in Kanak nation building. Conversely, the articulation of a coherent Kanak identity that is also recognizable to the outside world has provided opportunities for Kanak to claim rights over mineral resources in the North Province.

Foster noted that, in Papua New Guinea, the spread of commodity consumption has introduced the notion that such goods can “belong to everyone,” as they can be consumed regardless of social relations and indigenous exchange practices (2002). Similarly, in New Caledonia, Koniambo “belongs to everyone” in the imaginaries of a Kanak nation and identity. It is a project that looks to a future independent of France but one exhibiting transformed understandings of relationships with land—customarily based on reciprocity rather than individual landownership (Robbins 2006; Kirsch 2006; West 2006a, 2006b; Wood 2004): therefore, gaining recognition from the wider and white political world might involve the destruction of indigenous cosmology (Robbins 2006). As Michael Wood wrote (2004), in the Melanesian gift economy, people and things exist in a world of personal relations with places that provide fundamentally important ways of understanding existence as well as past, present, and future. When places change because of large-scale resource extraction, and disasters caused by these projects follow, people experience a profound loss of social relations, identities, and the past tied to those places (Kirsch 2006). On the other hand, Michael Scott has observed that among the Arosi in Solomon Islands, traditional understanding of territories and ancestral relationships to land continue to thrive in overlapping, contradictory, and fluid postcolonial contexts (2007). Various Melanesian state-making processes are thus marked by the creation of agency in a global context, by the creation of dual identity-building projects, and by transformations in order to garner outside recognition (Foster 2002).

Nonetheless, in what Karl Polanyi referred to as the creation of fictitious commodities (1944), when land is titled and labeled and when the territorializing power has the ability to draw boundaries around objects, people, and resources, the logic of land as a market-goods-producing commodity becomes normalized, and this single model inevitably becomes hegemonic (Peluso and Lund 2011). When the state classifies rural space and its populations into “tribal slots,” it typically results in the people becoming marginalized groups, while the resources of the locale are territorialized (Li 2000). Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso observed that such territorialization is all about “excluding or including people within particular territorial boundaries and about controlling what people do and

their access to natural resources within those boundaries” (1995, 388), concluding that territorial land-use planning is unachievable and utopian in that it ignores and contradicts indigenous lived histories and social relationships with land. Thus a state’s territorializing processes and resulting definitions of boundaries and calculable natural resources contradict the notion of territory as something that Arturo Escobar described as a relational and experienced, cosmological, and identity-building “place” for the people living there (2008, 42).

In New Caledonia, the state has remained a territorializing power throughout colonization and decolonization, and the social and economic inequality thus produced is reflected in the geographical segregation between Kanak and settlers in the region. The decolonizing Matignon Accords of 1988 divided the territory into three provinces: the North and South Provinces on the main island, and the Loyalty Islands, which lie to the east. France granted further autonomy to the three provinces in the Nouméa Accords in 1998. Frustrations and tensions remain, however, as the accords have not resolved critical social and economic problems, and the Kanak population still does not participate as equals in the territory (Connell 2003). Commercial and bureaucratic power resides in the south, mostly in the hands of the Europeans, while the more peripheral, Kanak-populated North Province and Loyalty Islands have been denied economic development. Meanwhile, analyses indicate that the Matignon and Nouméa Accords have actually delayed the independence referendum and fragmented what was once a strong independence movement (Fisher 2014; Connell 2003). Melanesian nationalists have accused France of using the delay and concurrent developments in migration as a means of keeping Melanesians in a minority and polarizing society with an influx of metropolitan French (Blay 1988; Connell 2003).

Thus recent trends have continued to support economic and social polarization and deprivation of ancestral lands, which was formalized in 1887 when the Code de l’Indigénat introduced closely regulated movement out of native reserve areas and exerted control within them. It also forbade Kanak entry to the capital city of Nouméa, situated in the South Province of the main island, and allowed nearly 90 percent of the land to be transferred to colonialists and the administration, to be used for economic or military ends (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998). It was not until 1946 that France granted citizenship to Kanak as part of global decolonization plans and the Code de l’Indigénat was abolished, although, unlike in many African French colonies, this did not lead to independence.

Rather, as part of the decolonization process, land was gradually classified as public, private, or “customary,” with ADRAF being established by the Matignon Accords (Bouard 2013). Answering to land-title claims made by groups such as families, clans, clan groups, or tribes who claim to be its original owners, ADRAF buys land and distributes it back to the groups as “customary land”; between 1978 and 2013 the percentage of customary lands on the main island increased from 9 percent to 17 percent (ADRAF 2013).

Elsewhere in Melanesia, the concept of “customary landowners” is problematic. For example, clans in Papua New Guinea have become landowners only during the course of the last ten years as a result of recent mineral exploitation (Filer 1997), although Golub suggested that Papua New Guinea’s “landowning group” is a myth that serves the national patrimony because “traditional Melanesian culture,” envisaged as ancient, unchanging, and peaceful, is regarded by metropolitans as a good basis for land registration (2014, 176). In New Caledonia, the category of customary land also serves a system of state territoriality, placing Kanak in a different economic position in relation to settlers because customary lands are not granted the same development opportunities as public or private lands since they are inalienable: they cannot be sold and their ownership may not be transferred. Furthermore, the customary land category reinforces understandings of North Province as “Kanak land” because the major proportion is found there, while the south and the capital have economically and administratively remained in the hands of the settlers. Thus state territoriality in New Caledonia has produced geographically based social and economic difference between Kanak and the French settlers in various ways—initially through land dispossession and then, in the process of decolonization, through the provincial divide and ADRAF-managed land classification and distribution. This naturalization of the top-down-managed “customary” category, together with neoliberal state policies wherein no functional regulative framework for private companies exists, is favorable to mining companies that can negotiate with communities privately and do not have to be held environmentally or socially responsible for the wider society. Multinational mining projects are both shaped by local forms of governance and shape the state-building processes of the countries where they operate (Le Meur and others 2013). Thus the two mining projects discussed in this essay both manifest the polarized society of Kanak and settlers in the area and comprise the conjuncture of local politics and mining projects that almost certainly will shape the future of the nation.



## MINING INDUSTRY IN A NEOLIBERAL STATE

The roots of the state-supported capitalist mining industry lie far back in New Caledonian colonialist history and in the state's territorial control. Private companies, comprising an elite economic power, were part of the administration and expansion of European colonies in which, in general, native populations were separated from colonial economic growth and colonial sovereignty was outsourced to small elites of plantation owners (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). European stock farmers and coffee planters, for example, were important factors influencing New Caledonian settlement and land demarcations: Planters had sovereign rights over their land as individual owners, in contrast to Melanesians, who were not considered capable of developing land on an individual basis (Doumenge 1998). Since its instigation in 1874, the mining industry has relied on more than a hundred years of legislative support from the French government. The penal colony population and the imported workforce, who worked in slave-like conditions under collective contracts, were initially in the service of the industry (Bencivengo 2014), while New Caledonia's leading European families, who dominate the overall economy and have great political power, owe much of their wealth to involvement in nickel mining. Since the Matignon and Nouméa Accords, the three provinces have had autonomy over the management of their economies and natural resources, but the French state still gets revenue from them and, in return, supports the industry financially when mining activity is slow or provides tax relief (Le Meur, Horowitz, and Mennesson 2013).

New Caledonia's mining could be analyzed from the "resource curse" perspective (Auty 1993), and certainly aspects of the condition as it is broadly understood are apparent in the territory. Proponents of the concept often focus on economic and political factors such as the mismanagement or distortion of the economy caused by mineral dependency and the intensification of conflict between the competing actors that may result (Ballard and Banks 2003); long-term environmental damage (Filer and Macintyre 2006); and, in cultural terms, the development of unrealistic hopes and expectations among people who do not derive any benefit from resource extraction. However, while all these features are clearly present in New Caledonia, the perspective masks the heterogenic historical and national trajectories of the mining industry that have been nurtured by the territory's neoliberal political climate (Le Meur and Banaré 2014). Neoliberalism can be characterized by strong private property rights, free

market, and free trade; and where a market does not exist—as is the case with traditional land use, water, or social security—one is created (Harvey 2006). Central to neoliberalization is the “spatial fix”: a means for capitalism to solve its crises by expanding into new territories (Harvey 2001). Capitalist expansion also requires the re-creation of nature as the biophysical world increasingly enters the sphere of capitalist accumulation, while, as a general rule, the neoliberal state does not interfere when problems result but rather encourages its citizens to take communal or personal responsibility (Castree 2008). It should be noted, however, that, following James Ferguson (2010), neoliberalism as such is not an automatic evil; it is how it is applied that makes the difference. Neoliberalism can also be an “art of governance” that may be put to use in reducing poverty.

The multinational mining industry is driven by and connected to flows of international finance, but two different political circumstances characterize the mining corporation–government–citizen nexuses of the two provinces (Le Meur and others 2013). In the north, the mining enclave is the product of the province’s partnership with the private sector, whereas in the south, the setting is one of conflict and agreement between the community and the mining corporation (Le Meur and others 2013). In both cases, however, the context is one of state neoliberalization, especially marked by outsourcing the development of society and its well-being to private mining companies. During the period of decolonization, New Caledonia has become a territory where the extraction of mineral resources by private companies has left no room for environmental or social concern but rather has been considered the most effective means to promote development and employment. Certainly, it must be said that many Kanak have found employment through the Koniambo project and thirty further mine sites, of which some are locally owned and some are owned by multinational companies (Horowitz 2015).

The New Caledonian Mining Code, adopted in 2009, is a scheme governing all mining industry in the country that concerns nickel, chrome, and cobalt. One feature of the code is that of “mine police,” explained to me by a DIMENC official as an institution responsible for the environmental surveillance of the mining projects. But, the official added, the projects are controlled by the provinces, which independently have general authority over all environmental matters. Mining is poorly managed, and the consequences have been devastating for New Caledonia’s ecosystems: Erosion on the mountains, sedimentation on the coasts, and heavy metal

pollution in potable water supplies and lagoons are only some of the negative impacts (Ali and Grewal 2006).

The anticolonial and pro-independence movements in the 1970s listed resource sovereignty and mining reform among their objectives (Horowitz 2010), influencing the development of the nickel industry in the north with its high number of customary land areas and majority Kanak population. Through transfers of title between French-owned nickel producer Société Le Nickel (SLN) and Société Minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP), which is owned by the North Province, the nickel-rich Koniambo massif was shifted to the ownership of SMSP and Canadian Falconbridge (now Glencore Xstrata), which financed the bulk of the project costs while SMSP remained the majority owner with 51 percent (Bouard 2013; Connell 2003). Construction began on the project in 2007, and production was officially inaugurated in 2014, using a low-cost pyrometallurgical process to produce ferronickel taken from its open-pit mine. The goal is to produce 60,000 tonnes of ferronickel yearly over twenty-five years of mine life, although production targets have not yet been met. The transfer of Koniambo ownership to the North Province is the embodiment of great hopes for Kanak as it is a highly politicized project with nationalistic vision; the possibilities of economic self-sufficiency that it offers are necessary for autonomy, since it is expected to contribute to the territory's long-term economic development and employment (Horowitz 2004).

In 1999, the Canadian mining company Inco completed a pilot nickel refinery located at the southern tip of the main island. It was bought by Brazilian CVRD (Companhia Vale do Rio Doce; later renamed Vale) in 2006 and should have reached its full capacity in 2015 (Horowitz 2015). Vale's refinery, which is equal in size to Koniambo, uses a hydrometallurgical acid leaching process due to the ore's low mineral content, a process dangerous to the environment because there is a risk of toxic chemicals and heavy metals entering the rivers and the lagoon; the effluent is released into the ocean through a submarine pipe, and tailings are disposed of on dry land (Ali and Grewal 2006). From the beginning, the project was resisted by neighboring Kanak communities and environmental organizations even though not strictly rejected by Kanak chiefs because of its employment prospects (Ali and Grewal 2006; Horowitz 2015). However, neither the construction of the project nor the refinery itself has employed many of the local Kanak population.

As very few Kanak are in governmental or influential positions, they have had little power to influence the project's development from its inception.

Work on the mine site was already underway while Kanak in the Goro area—worried that it would threaten their subsistence and livelihoods, as well as their traditional fishing and hunting grounds—were still searching for experts to provide an independent analysis of its expected impacts (Ali and Grewal 2006). Between 2009 and 2014 environmental incidents took place almost yearly, the latest in May 2014 when, due to human error, over 90,000 liters of acidic effluent leaked into a creek, killing fish in great numbers, polluting the environment, and finally flowing to the lagoon and fishing grounds. In the early years of the refinery, local Kanak resistance to it coalesced into an association called Rhéébù Nùù, the first environmental social movement in New Caledonia. It distributed pamphlets, organized public meetings, sent letters, and attracted support from similar indigenous environmental movements abroad (Horowitz 2010). In 2004 it turned to more radical strategies, instigating violent protests, destruction of equipment and blockades, and finally a short suspension of factory operations in 2006 (Horowitz 2015). However, on 27 September 2008, when Vale had already bought the refinery from Inco, the Pact for the Sustainable Development of the South was signed in the town of Yaté between Vale Inco, the Customary Council of Djubéa Kaponé, Rhéébù Nùù, and the Customary Senat. There would be no more violent protests, and in turn the corporation would finance social and environmental development of affected communities for thirty years through the Corporation Foundation (later renamed the Vale Foundation). The Comité Consultatif Coutumier Environnemental (CCCE) was also created to be responsible for the surveillance of the corporation's environmental impact. During the timeline, the corporation would, for example, replant trees in the zones affected by mining, build a visitor center, hire environmental technicians for the CCCE, and create nursery gardens (Vale Inco 2008).

The pact is based on the premises of the decolonizing Nouméa Accords (which underline the importance of traditional indigenous culture) and on the premises of “sustainable development” from the 1992 Rio summit (Vale Inco 2008, article 1). Although never explicitly titled as such by the corporation, the Vale pact is an Impact and Benefit Agreement (IBE) belonging to the tools and strategies of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Le Meur, Horowitz, and Mennesson 2013). This is a concept described by Marina Welker as being created in answer to the questions asked by transnational social movements of the 1990s about the undemocratic activities of corporations and international institutions: CSR “seizes the movement” before it seizes control over the corporation (Welker 2009). Voluntary

self-regulation, audit culture, and the importance of keeping business as a priority and maximizing profit rather than prioritizing ethical considerations are typical of CSR practices. Even though the state is absent from these agreements with communities, through CSR strategies, corporations become a state-like presence in remote areas by building infrastructure or providing education and community programs (Welker 2009).

### “WE DID NOT NEED ANOTHER FACTORY IN THE SOUTH”

The social development that Vale has brought to the South Province is questionable: employment figures for the Kanak population are low, and ecologically damaging accidents continue. As the financial interests of the South Province’s governmental regulators are vested in VNC’s project, DIMENC—a governmental institution—has not put efficient pressure on the province to negatively sanction the company. While the South Province owns only a small part of the company, it was the French state that originally convinced Inco to invest in New Caledonia, with a tax exemption plan involving US\$100 million worth of savings (Horowitz 2015, 93).

In November and December 2014, some of those Kanak who, through the structures of the Vale Foundation and the CCCE, are responsible for the surveillance and implementation of the Vale Pact discussed Vale’s Goro project with me for the purpose of this essay. It soon became clear that the Kanak pact supervisors face a dilemma with regard to the corporation that employs them, as the contract has not brought the sustainable social and environmental development that was promised. One informant, who had formerly been an activist and a Rhéébù Nùù member and is now a Vale Foundation representative, observed in an interview: “We have always been against the project.” It seemed that by “we” he meant both himself and other Kanak who had agreed, on the basis of the pact, to work on the mining corporation’s terms and abandon protests. He said that the refinery of the north was a much-needed project for the rebalancing of the country but added, “We did not need another factory in the south”—meaning that as there is already a French-owned refinery in Nouméa (Eramet’s Doniambo plant), another under non-Kanak ownership would produce economic and social imbalance. When asked about the contract’s current influence on surrounding communities, a representative of CCCE answered that “the pact is for thirty years but it will not last that long,” implying that the environment would be ruined long before that. Thus the views of Kanak representatives of both the Vale Foundation and the CCCE

supported each other; it seemed clear, in conversation with these informants, that they felt they needed to express the resentment they currently felt toward the nickel factory.

Between the last incident of acidic effluent pollution (in May 2014) and November 2014, representatives of the Vale Foundation, the CCCE, chiefs of nearby communities, and other actors had over sixty meetings, making over one hundred recommendations, most of which have still been left unanswered by the corporation. When asked about the relationship that Vale Foundation and the CCCE presently have with the corporation, my informants answered that there are “problems of articulation,” adding that they are starting to get the feeling that the corporation’s attitude toward the Kanak supervisors of the pact is “insulting.” Finally, there was an outburst of frustration about the fact that it is impossible to close the factory, that there is no trust left, and that there is “nothing that can be done” about the situation.

When asked about the possible developmental impacts that the pact has had on communities, the CCCE representative replied: “Vale finances a certain well-being, but can it really be described as such?” He was referring to the financing of school canteens, the building of tribal storage houses and libraries, and publication of educational and promotional leaflets and other materials. He explained how, beyond the structures of the contract and bypassing traditional Kanak hierarchies, the corporation also gives “individual money” to people in various positions in the clans and villages. It seems that the corporation’s pact has encouraged what Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch called the “politics of resignation,” which hinders the possibilities for radical protest and change (2010, 466). When corporations connected to potentially damaging industries shift their strategies from rejection of criticism to engagement, their tactics often lead to feelings of disempowerment and frustration in the social worlds in which they function: the critics’ ability and motivation to bring about radical restructuring and change is reduced when corporations actively engage with them and assimilate them into corporate structures by forming partnerships or recruiting activists to join boards of directors or work as public relations advisors (Benson and Kirsch 2010, 466).

It is here that Ferguson’s concept of anti-politics in terms of mining development becomes central. VNC has not been able to provide the “development” that was promised in the pact, at least not in the ways that local Kanak expected. The Kanak’s historically produced, socially and economically inferior position has merely been depoliticized and reduced

to a pact without taking into any account their political or socioeconomic role or their limited access to land more broadly. On the contrary, the pact by its very existence suspends any kind of political discourse. Keeping in mind that the VNC nickel project is entangled with the political and financial interests of the south's white ruling elite, the corporate appropriation of Kanak resistance has led to a situation in which development promised in the pact seems to be working precisely like Ferguson's "anti-politics machine" (2006, 280), treating political questions of land, resources, jobs, and wages as technical problems and transferring the power of the state to the corporation.

Corporate strategies that are supported by neoliberalist state policies but that are in strict contradiction with the social world and the territorial relationships of local people have, as Horowitz pointed out (2015), been "culturally articulated" and legitimated in the pact. VNC's corporate social responsibility strategies have appropriated resistance and both the state's formal and protestors' informal powers of regulation. The representatives of the Vale Foundation and the CCCE are in ambiguous positions: in the past they resisted the corporation, but now they engage actively with it on an almost daily basis. While they might not previously have held high positions in the traditional hierarchies, they now speak for their communities, and while they claim they are proud of a pact that benefits their communities' development, in the same breath they express their disappointment about the corporation's subsequent actions.

The ambiguous positions of these informants are comparable to those of Alex Golub's "spokesmen" for his leviathans (2014, 19). Given that an abstract entity such as a mining corporation has agents to represent it, indigenous people must also become a corporate group that can be similarly represented in order for both the mine and people to be feasible as interlocutors. Thus southern Kanak affected by VNC are articulated in the Vale Pact as "stakeholders" (*parties prenantes*) that have a special "historical, mythical and cultural relationship to land" (Vale Inco 2008, article 1). It is, however, unclear who represents whom: whether the indigenous representatives really represent the indigenous people or the mine or are merely acting in their own self-interest (Golub 2014, 28). Indeed, in answer to my further inquiries into the foundations of negative developments, one representative from the CCCE observed that "it is all politics." He then went on to talk about his tribe's customary land. Pointing out the window to some houses on a nearby hill in the Nouméa suburb where we were conducting the interview, he said: "There is my tribe. There are



all those foreign influences, but we have always resisted.” Taking a piece of paper, he drew a circle in the middle, surrounded it with some smaller circles, and said: “That is us, and all these around us, they are foreigners.” The VNC problem is clearly a continuation of the state’s policies of territorialization and neoliberalization whereby Melanesian land has been reclassified according to Western assumptions of landownership. Kanak representatives in the south also understand VNC and the pact to be an ongoing part of the history of dispossession, territorialization, and colonialist divide whereby Kanak have been isolated and treated as strangers in their own land. Yet the space for Kanak in New Caledonia is small in terms of political or economic power, and it is only by appropriating Western concepts of landownership that the Kanak have recently been able to acquire financial clout. It could be said that Koniambo in the north represents a culmination of the logic of Kanak capitalist land development and growing economic and collective power.

#### KONIAMBO STRENGTHENS SOVEREIGNTY

Koniambo has been supported by France and French loyalists as a peace-maintenance project because of its balancing influence (Horowitz 2010). For the same reason, questions arise as to whether it advances or delays independence and the extent to which it works for the benefit of indigenous sovereignty (Horowitz 2004). Undeniably, a focus on economic development requires financial assistance from France, which in turn invokes political dependency. In settler states, the position of colonized populations is contradictory in terms of economic and political power (Cattelino 2010); indigenous people require economic resources to exercise sovereignty, and often their revenues are based on their governmental rights as indigenous citizens. However, increasing wealth on the part of the colonized population is understood in the wider society, in law, in public culture, and in interaction as individualized economic and political assimilation to the settler population (Cattelino 2010). Indigenous economic development and indigenous sovereignty development thus easily negate one another.

Sonia Grochain, David Poithily, and Jean-Michele Sourisseau noted that it is still difficult to define objectively the social and economic impacts of large-scale mineral exploitation in the North Province and that uncertainty remains among the people in the province concerning Koniambo’s impacts on the Kanak’s social organization and economy as well as the



natural environment (2012). While the mine has employed local Kanak, including youth, the employment of Kanak women remains marginal. As large-scale resource extraction is dominated by distant capital and responsive to fluctuating international markets (Kirsch 2014), the reliability of Koniambo in terms of market risks may be questioned. Furthermore, concerns have been expressed that Koniambo's huge infrastructure will have a destructive impact on the environment, including local rivers and marine ecosystems (Ali and Grewal 2006). The factory's coal-fueled power plant will also be a massive fossil-fuel polluter, and the overall emissions of the complex will be higher than those of Goro (Ali and Grewal 2006). Matthias Kowasch noted that because of the growing mineral industry in the whole New Caledonia region, attention to environmental details and local environmental surveillance has recently gained more ground (2012), and in 2006 a committee consisting of local customary authorities (*djelawe*) was established to survey Koniambo's environmental impacts.

Even though the Koniambo complex was established on the basis of political aspirations, to what extent is it possible to lean on an industrial project for stable rebalancing of power asymmetries? After all, the project is a joint venture with a multinational corporation that is seeking to maximize its profit, and that lies outside the political and regional framework of the Kanak independence question. It is claimed that the mine's life will extend to twenty-five years, but in terms of long-term regional development, this does not provide much of a future. What will happen to employment prospects, for example, after the ore has been exhausted? Furthermore, currently there is only Koniambo to muster aspirations for financial independence that might advance political independence from France. There are still two massive French and Brazilian nickel refineries in the south, along with numerous smaller mining projects that do not have a political background of promoting Kanak independence.

Nonetheless, the Koniambo refinery symbolically strengthens a model of Kanak sovereignty that has been historically imagined and constructed and creatively articulated. Koniambo can be understood to exist in the framework of what Partha Chatterjee described as nationalism's "inner" and "material" domains, connecting more spiritual nationalist aspirations with material means (1996). Anticolonialist nationalism likewise creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society by dividing the world into the material and the spiritual: The material incorporates the economy, statecraft, and technology, areas in which the colonial government has proven its superiority; on the other hand, the spiritual, "inner" domain

that essentializes cultural identity and from which the colonial state is excluded is even more important. Through the inner domain, nationalism fashions a “modern” national culture that demarcates it from the West, one in which the nation is already brought into being as sovereign even if the colonial power still governs the state (Chatterjee 1996).

It must be kept in mind that Kanak definitions of identity and anticolonialist nationalism have developed in the context of French colonization (Fisher 2014). As Tanya Murray Li wrote, “Every articulation is a creative act” (2000, 169), but it is also structured through previous engagements. The ways in which Kanak identity came to be imagined and articulated were also influenced, among other factors, by individuals such as Jean-Marie Tjibaou, assassinated in 1989 by a radical independence activist. Tjibaou started the modern Kanak independence movement and was the first leader of the independence party Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). He imagined a Kanak modernity that would involve the emergence of a new Kanak who was distinctively Melanesian but simultaneously universal (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998). “A return to tradition is a myth. For me, the model, the search for an identity is ahead of oneself, never behind. . . . Our identity is ahead of us,” Tjibaou stated in a March 1985 interview in the French journal *Les Temps Modernes* (quoted in Tjibaou 1996, 155). According to Tjibaou, sovereignty meant interdependence but also the right to choose one’s partners (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998).

Tjibaou’s nationalism was fueled by ethnological definitions and his experiences as a student in France and as a Catholic priest; he saw taking over the mines as only one route to economic independence, even though that was the path chosen by independence leaders who followed in his wake (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998). Kanak resource nationalism based on mineral wealth that influenced the development of the Koniambo massif in the 1990s also grew from Tjibaou’s clearly articulated thoughts of a Kanak identity with Western attributes and an imagined future. Foster has further suggested that globalization has expanded horizons for Melanesian people and Pacific Islanders and oriented them toward membership in an enlarged world, though he also noted that while globalization may be used to assert connectivity to imagined, global communities such as a “nation,” these assertions are also somewhat bound up with the colonial contexts from which they emerge (2002, 133–134). Koniambo is a materialization of both the spiritual search for sovereignty and the generation of global connectivity through the means that are at hand in the specific

historical and political situation. With its offshore factory ready in South Korea and the concrete possibilities of employment that it offers, it might lead the way for wider social and economic development for Kanak in the whole of New Caledonia.

## MINING DEVELOPMENT AND DIFFERENT FUTURES

Kanak attach different futures to Koniambo and to VNC: those in the south in particular lean on articulations of a unifying Kanak indigeneity in their opposition to VNC and in claims that “we did not need another factory in the south,” as if they feel a sense of ownership for Koniambo in the north. Following Rutherford (2008), these articulations are also meant for outsiders and are part of an anticolonialist nationalism that is in the process of imagining a collectivity that may be recognized from the outside. Koniambo has, therefore, been a means to enact Kanak sovereignty. With the support of clearly articulated definitions of a coherent Kanak identity in history, such as those formulated by Tjibaou, it has been possible for Kanak to establish anticolonialist nationalism and a vision of independence by claiming ownership over distinctively Kanak land and its economic resources in the North Province. The state’s territorializing processes have thus also influenced why the north has become “more Kanak” than the south.

There is power in social imaginaries that bind sectors of populations together and incorporate ideas of how matters ought to be and what should be considered “development” (Chaloping-March 2014). Development through mining is an effective narrative by which mining in many parts of the world is legitimated because it powerfully incorporates promise for the future (Golub 2014). As noted by Anna Tsing, the presence of valuable minerals in peripheral regions evokes both the imagination of international investors and national visions of miraculous futures; she added, however, that in the regional creation of frontier mining areas where extraction occurs, local places and knowledges become invisible (Tsing 2000). The mining “spectacle” and its development narrative thus hide locally important ways of knowing and seeing land, and yet alternative futures beyond mining may be hard to imagine. Kowasch noted how the mining industry has transformed Kanak territorial perceptions in that they increasingly make claims about their customary lands in environmentalist terms; furthermore, the presence of sacred clan sites in Koniambo’s exploitation areas may give rise to active resistance by some clans, while

others may abandon the sites in favor of financial benefits from the mining company (2012, 217). On the other hand, new but contradicting forms of resistance, alliance, and argumentation have emerged in the south with the establishment of the environmental organization l'Oeil and the recent addition of the lagoon to the UNESCO world heritage list, as tourism, the marine environment's significance for the province, and even the lagoon's global importance have gained more attention (Levacher 2015). Meanwhile, as Horowitz has recently observed (2016), UNESCO's large-scale conservation measures have even caused difficulties for those in the local mining resistance movement, as they have not been provided with the support they had anticipated.

Willingness to give up the past in exchange for expectations of future development—or, possibly, recognition—has been observed in Papua New Guinea in particular (West 2006a, 2006b; Robbins 2006; Golub 2014). In Paige West's description, for example, the Gimi are willing to relinquish their customs and enter a new world of individual property rights in their relations with people from institutions concerned with wildlife management and biodiversity conservation (2006a). They are not, however, willing to give up their "Giminess" in terms of measuring everything through reciprocity. What follows is that the Gimi are not seeing their expectations of development fulfilled in exchange for their friendship, land, labor, and food. They are not getting benefits from a form of development that for the conservationists means inculcating the Gimi into valuing the biodiversity of their environment as an economic resource. The overriding response on both sides is one of disappointment because the aspirations that the project entails for the groups involved do not match. Mining and large, environment-changing capitalist projects shape local ideas of "development" and expectations concerning the future, with modernity producing contradictory responses (West 2006b). For the Gimi, for example, two alternative futures could be envisaged: either the transformation of their home territory through mining development or the integration of their village into environmental conservation goals and the sustainable commodity market via ecotourism and handicrafts. Both of these futures incorporate expectations of the projects bringing long-term social relations that in turn would mean access to "development" and benefits for all people equally. Either the mine or the conservation area is inevitable because the alternative would be that the Gimi would be left on the other side of development. Yet, as one Gimi man observed to West on the subject of the Porgera mine: "But what if you are not one of the people that

get a job or a nice house?” (2006b, 306). This strongly resonates with the terms in which one of my informants addressed the issue of the development impact of VNC: “What is the benefit of the mine for those who cultivate land?” The counter-narrative to the development that mining brings is provided by people on the margins (West 2006b), people who do not get any benefit from the promised improvements but rather witness downsides like alcoholism, envy, and prostitution—the “breaking of social tissue,” as the CCCE representative worded it to me.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both VNC’s pact of sustainable development and the Koniambo complex are anti-politics machines, but in their own way. The outsourcing to mining corporations of the state’s public functions of generating development and reducing poverty through territorialization and neoliberal governance depoliticizes the larger, historically born inequalities and territorializing processes that affect New Caledonia’s Kanak communities. VNC’s pact maintains an economic imbalance between Kanak and whites across the whole territory and in opposition to trends in the north; it also appropriates political resistance and questions of Kanak territorial relationships in favor of the corporate and capitalist model whereby people in their relations with the corporation are naturalized as “stakeholders.” At the same time, the French state benefits from the fact that the pact is between the corporation and the communities, thereby delimiting the state’s social responsibilities. Meanwhile the communities are themselves responsible for the surveillance of the refinery’s environmental and social impact, although when problems occur, there is not much that can be done since it is impossible to resist the refinery outside of the pact’s structures. There is no room to bring to table the question of whether the refinery should even exist, given that it seems to strengthen French and white elite political and economic power in the region and to represent a possible hindrance to Kanak self-determination.

In the case of the Koniambo complex, sovereignty is advanced but development is limited to the social and economic growth that the mining industry can offer. Koniambo’s development narrative is so powerful that it overshadows other questions such as who really benefits from the factory, whether it advances independence from France, and its long-term social and environmental impacts. Furthermore, the narrative of economic development and Kanak independence attached to Koniambo makes it

difficult to think about the future in terms other than mining and other than capitalist types of land relations. Meanwhile, we are still waiting for Koniambo to show its real impact on society, to see whether it will produce change, reduce inequality, and give way to other types of emancipating projects as well. Nevertheless, in the light of the world's growing mineral demands, it is increasingly important to question and understand the complex historical and social circumstances and contrasting trajectories through which materials so fundamentally important to the capitalist world are extracted, refined, and enter global market systems.

\* \* \*

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### *Abstract*

In New Caledonia, where a referendum deciding on independence will be held by 2018, processes of state territorialization and neoliberalization have led to an economic and social imbalance between the poorer, largely Kanak-populated North Province and the wealthier, mostly European-populated South Province. As a result of historically and clearly articulated definitions of a coherent indigenous Kanak identity, however, the Kanak independence movement has been able to tie its sovereignty expectations to the development of the mining industry in the north. I argue that unequal processes of state territorialization and the neoliberal, decolonizing state have influenced the outcomes of the local mining industry, resulting in different expectations for the future in the two regions. In the North, the Koniambo nickel project is advancing Kanak sovereignty development, while, in the south, Vale's mining project and its pact of corporate social responsibility and social development with the southern Kanak communities is indirectly strengthening French power as well as co-opting Kanak protests. This essay reviews how both mining projects work as what James Ferguson has called the "anti-politics machine" of development, hiding the roots of the inequality and poverty experienced by people aspiring to recognition and freedom and leaving little space for alternative imaginaries of future (1994).

KEYWORDS: territorialization, neoliberalization, mining, sovereignty